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S E R M O N

ON

FAITH AND ELECTION,

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

DECEMBER 5, 1790,

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S E R M O N

FAITH AND ELECTION

OF

BY

WILLIAM

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S E R M O N, &c.

S. JOHN xvi: 12, 13.

I HAVE YET MANY THINGS TO SAY
UNTO YOU, BUT YE CANNOT BEAR
THEM NOW:
HOWBEIT, WHEN HE, THE SPIRIT OF
TRUTH, IS COME, HE WILL GUIDE
YOU INTO ALL TRUTH.

IN enquiring what those truths were, of
which our Lord forbore a disclosure
during his continuance upon earth, it im-
mediately occurs to our reflexion, that the
great founder of Christianity never openly
announced either the abasement of the
Mosaic ritual, or his pretensions to the
character of Messiah.

The wisdom of our Lord's reserve, in
regard to those two particulars, will appear

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in

in a striking point of view, if we cursorily turn our attention to certain tenets, prevalent in the Jewish nation.

Every member, for instance, of that community entertained a firm persuasion, that the Mosaic law, being divine in it's origin, would be perpetual in it's duration: that the descendants of Israel would be for ever, in an especial manner, shielded by providential superintendence: and that a Messiah would, about the period of our Saviour's appearance, present himself upon earth, for the purpose of rescuing God's chosen people from the dominion of foreigners; and of advancing them to a higher degree of prosperity, than they had ever before attained.

If to men, thus elate with ideas of precedency and exaltation, a complete view of the impending religious revolution had been at once unfolded, they would
have

have recoiled perhaps with expressions of abhorrence, from a system so replete with disappointment; and have transferred their devotion to some pretended Messiah, that held out doctrines more in unison with their wishes.

Most wisely therefore did the author of our religion withhold a full manifestation of the Christian scheme; and of his own august character, until admiration, excited by the stupendous events of resurrection and ascension, enforced by irradiations from the spirit of truth, should have prepared the minds of his disciples for a reception of unpalatable doctrines.

Their adoption, in a word, of tenets, in the highest degree offensive to their Jewish principles and feelings, was eventually ensured through the precaution of the communication being suspended. And delay became the source of conviction.

The province, let us now proceed to observe, of announcing to the Jews a crucified, not a victorious Messiah, and of proclaiming a general diffusion of God's especial grace, formerly confined to the people of Israel, seems principally to have devolved upon St. Paul. His education in the school of a Jewish doctor, in an eminent degree, qualified him for the important task: and enabled him to demonstrate the reasonableness of the Christian system to Jews by that most persuasive species of argumentation, an appeal to their favourite tenets.

The profound nature however of St. Paul's Jewish erudition, throws such a veil of abstruseness on some parts of his epistles, that St. Peter pronounces them *hard to be understood*.

Abstruseness in a writer produces sometimes ignorance, sometimes misconception of his meaning in the mind of a reader.

Let

Let us separately examine the respective operations of these two defects in apprehension with reference to St. Paul's epistles.

In regard to an incapacity of fathoming the recondite declarations of St. Paul, this intellectual disappointment is qualified in general by the following alleviation. The most difficult parts of St. Paul's writings are, in the opinion of the ablest commentators, addressed specifically to Jews*, either with a view of converting them to Christianity, or of weaning them, when converted, from immoderate devotion to the Mosaic ritual†.

Though Christians therefore should be embarrassed in deciphering St. Paul's Jewish disquisitions, they have, by virtue of being Christians, substantially attained all the effect aimed at in those disquisitions. They have

* These formed the majority of the early proselytes.

† The first object is principally pursued in the epistle to the Romans, the latter in that to the Galatians.

have summarily arrived at the point, to which St. Paul elaborately conducts the Jew: and are implicitly rivetted in system, which a Jew cannot reach but through the medium of an argumentative process.

Happy would it be for mankind, if a perversion of St. Paul's signification in his reasonings with Jews was equally innoxious with inability to develop it.

For, from a misconstruction of the words *elect*, *saved*, *chosen*, *justified*, and other Jewish phrases, what thick clouds of error have overspread the Christian hemisphere!

These expressions denote in general, agreeable to the tenor of their import in the Old Testament*, persons possessing a contingent prospect of Salvation, held out gratuitously, but attainable only conditionally, through a compliance with

* See Appendix (A).

with moral and religious stipulations*.

These forms of speech, at the same time, do in some instances describe characters endowed with a vested title to Salvation. This is their extended, but less frequent sense †.

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* *Elect.*

The words *Elect*, *Saved*, *Chosen*, *Justified*, in the following passages, are used in a confined sense, and allude to persons enjoying communion in Christ's church, under an uncertainty whether the privilege will finally be efficacious to their salvation.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, *elect* according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. 1 Pet. i. 1, 2.

Saved.

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he *saved* us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

See Appendix (B).

† *Elect.*

The expressions, *Elect*, *Saved*, *Chosen*, *Justified*, in the following paragraphs, point out persons, destined beyond the reach of contingency to the enjoyment of eternal glory.

He shall send his angels with a great sound of trumpet; and they shall gather together his *elect*. Matt. xxiv. 31.

Saved.

He that endureth unto the end shall be *saved*. Matt. xxiv. 13.

Chosen.

A confusion of the paragraphs, where the words in question carry the former, with those where they convey the latter sentiment, has occasioned some to esteem faith, others election, independant of virtue, sufficient pledges of advancement to everlasting glory.

Let us endeavour to reclaim persons infatuated by such fatal chimeras,

In subservience to this salutary purpose we may remark, that the Evangelical writings, which record the doctrines personally dictated by our Lord, contain various explicit exhortations to the cultivation of moral

Chosen.

Ye (all the Christians in Asia and other extensive regions, enumerated above under the word elect) are a *chosen* generation, 1 Pet. ii. 9.

Justified.

That being thus *justified* by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Tit. iii. 7. See Appendix (B).

Chosen.

Many are called, but few are *chosen*. Matt. xx. 13.

Justified.

In the day of judgement, by thy words thou shalt be *justified*, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. Matt. xii. 36, 37.

moral excellence, accompanied with this general declaration from our blessed Saviour, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven.* Matt. vii. 21.

But if the dogmas, ascribed to St. Paul, by Calvinists, actually existed in his writings, St. Paul would rest our hopes of heaven on circumstances different from those pointed out by the Lord of life. In which contingency (as the authority of the disciple is subordinate to that of the master) it would be our duty to observe the directions of Christ, in preference to those of St. Paul.

Happily the supposition of any repugnance between the doctrines of our Saviour, and his apostle, is totally destitute of foundation. For St. Paul expressly informs us in his epistle to the Romans, ii, 7. that eternal

nal life must be sought for *by patient continuance in well-doing*. Again, in the epistle to Titus, iii. 8. he inculcates rectitude in the following animated strain, *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God be careful to maintain good works*.—He apprizes us too in the first epistle to the Corinthians, xiii. 2. that faith unaccompanied by charity loses it's significance*, and, xiii. 13. that in the scale of Christian excellence charity holds the most exalted situation†.

In correspondence with these doctrines of St. Paul and the evangelists, St. James asserts, ii. 10. *That faith without works is dead*.

The

• Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

† And now abide these three, faith, hope, charity, and the greatest of these is charity.

The deduction, which irresistibly results from the texts now exhibited, is, that if St. Paul had actually advanced the notions concerning *faith* and *election* ascribed to him by Calvinists, St. Paul would be at variance with himself, with his associate St. James, and with his great master Christ.

Let Calvinists therefore beware, lest they inadvertently furnish weapons to infidelity; and while they perplex the doctrines, debase the credit of St. Paul's writings.

St. Paul himself, at the commencement of his epistle to the Romans, seems apprehensive that his assertions relative to faith, in the five first chapters of that epistle, might possibly give birth to theories similar to those we have examined. For in the first verse of the sixth chapter, reviewing, as it were, the general tenor of what he had advanced, and perceiving it susceptible
of

of dangerous construction, he feelingly protests against such exposition of his writings, by exclaiming, " What shall we say then, " shall we continue in sin, that grace may " abound, God forbid ! "

God indeed for ever forbid, that the banners of depravity should be seen waving on the walls of the temple ; and that religion, which was intended to improve mankind, should become instrumental to their debasement and contamination.

It may be useful to suggest, that certain wonderful operations of faith, pointed out by St. Paul in the fourth chapter to the Romans 18, 19. and in several parts of the 11th chapter to the Hebrews, are the characteristic exertions of the early converts to Christianity; or of Christians at any period struggling with persecution: while they have no scope of display in æras of tranquility.

What

What vigor, for instance, of "hope against hope believing in hope" Romans vi. 19. must a Jew have possessed to overcome the embarrassing reflexions that intruded on his mind at his approach to the Christian pale.

He was impressed, as we have before seen, with the hope of a temporal Messiah, armed with might, and shining in the splendor of imperial magnificence—While his expectations thus pointed to a throne, his attention was directed to a cross! he beheld the redeemer of Israel surrounded, not by triumphant generals, but condemned malefactors; and his sacred brow, instead of sparkling with gems, disfigured with thorns!

Both Jews moreover and Gentiles, at the first propagation of the gospel, had not only inveterate prejudices to surmount, but the most formidable species of discouragement

agement to encounter. They were called to act in a theatre reeking with blood, and exhibiting continually the most tragical catastrophes.

How different is the situation of persons, born in a country quietly professing Christianity. The holy flame of faith is kindled in their minds by tuition, without any elaborate exertions of their own: it is fanned by the concurrence of the most respectable characters around them: it is cherished, not repressed by the magistrate: and is, in well-disposed hearts, more easily kept alive, than extinguished.

Those, whom misconstruction of the seventeenth article of the English church has led to magnify beyond due bounds the operation of election, ought attentively to consider the beginning of the second paragraph of the article in question.

That

That clause declares " That the godly
 " consideration of predestination and our
 " election in Christ is full of sweet, plea-
 " sant, and unspeakable comfort to godly
 " persons, and *such* as feel in themselves
 " the workings of the spirit of Christ, *mor-*
 " *tifying the deeds of the flesh and their earthly*
 " *members, and drawing up their minds to*
 " *high and heavenly things.*"

The language here employed clearly intimates, That, in the opinion of those who framed the articles, moral excellence is the only test through which any individual can ascertain the efficacy of election in regard to his personal salvation.

All other characteristics, except godliness and goodness, may possibly exist in a bad, equally with a good man: and, if any criterion whatever could impress a profligate with conviction, that heaven was his indefeasible birth-right, the persuasion
 would

would certainly be matter of *comfort* to him, no less than to a person of a more respectable description.

A miscreant, in truth, predestined to the enjoyment of everlasting bliss, would probably appear, in his own judgement, more highly privileged, than a saint invested with the same prerogative. He would indulge perhaps a degree of wayward exultation, in reflecting, that he could deliberately sin, yet be determinately saved: that the mansions of purity were become the receptacle of corruption: and that the turbulent, foul torrent of a vicious life would terminate, by divine appointment, in a sea of glory.

If election * indeed, separate from good works,

* Some men found their hope of unalterable destination to heaven, independent of goodness, on *justification*, others on *grace*, others on *regeneration*. Under whatever phrase they couch the enormous expectation, they fall alike within the scope of the reasoning, employed in this paragraph.

works, could ensure access to the regions of eternal glory, the scriptural injunctions of rectitude in subservience to this grand consummation must be esteemed unwarrantable requisitions of superfluous exertion: imposing a tribute not prescribed in the unconditional charter of predestination: and alloying our present pleasures, without enhancing our future enjoyments.

The exorbitant, irrational, and mischievous exaggerations of the privileges belonging to election, adopted by Calvinists, may decisively be obviated by a brief appeal to St. Peter's use of the word *elect*.

That apostle, for instance, in the first chapter of his first Epistle, ver. 1, 2. positively pronounces "the strangers scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, *elect* according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."

In the first chapter however, ver. 10. of his second Epistle, he thus cautions these *elect* characters, " Give diligence to make " your calling and *election* sure."

And in the third chapter, ver. 17. of the same epistle he subjoins this additional admonition, " Ye therefore beloved beware, " lest ye also, being led away by the error " of the wicked, fall from your own stead- " fastness."

This series of texts, combined in one point of view, proves incontestably, that election did not, in the opinion of St. Peter, exempt men from danger of apostacy; and would not, without concurrent exertions of the elect, ensure the attainment of everlasting glory.

Election, in fine, in the *condition of it's* tenure, seems to resemble an earthly inheritance. This fortunate possession, we
well

well know, properly improved enriches and blesses it's proprietor. But entirely uncultivated presents a scene of disgusting desolation totally devoid of any useful or ornamental product.



APPENDIX (A).

THE whole Jewish nation, every individual in it of course inclusively, is pronounced in the Old Testament an *elect, chosen, saved, justified* people.

Elect.

For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine *elect*. Isa. xlv. 4.

Chosen.

Ye children of Jacob his *chosen*. Ps. cv. 6.

Ye children of Jacob his *chosen* ones.
1 Chro. xvi. 13.

Saved.

Who is like unto thee, O people *saved* by the Lord. Deut. xxxiii. 29.

Justified.

In the Lord shall *all* the seed of Israel be *justified*. Is. xlv. 25.

Not-

Notwithstanding however their enjoyment of these high distinctions, they were repeatedly punished for delinquency.

St. Paul, for instance, informs us, 1 Cor. x. 5. that "with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

Their various enormities, with the chastisements respectively attendant on them, are displayed by the apostle in ver. 7, 8, 9, 10, of the same chapter.

In the 11th ver. St Paul addresses the following warning to Christians, "All these things happened to them *for our ensamples*: and they are written *for our admonition*."

The catastrophes, which beset the Jews in the desert, demonstrate, that their religious prerogatives afforded no sanction to their crimes.

Again,

22 APPENDIX (A).

Again, the pointed application of their example to Christians shows, that the latter body of religionists are in a similar situation with the former, in the article of moral responsibility.

Though, in truth, both the Jewish and Christian dispensations had their origin in God's free grace, independent of human merit, yet both systems aimed ultimately at the encouragement of moral and religious excellence.

The sum of a Jew's duty, as sketched by the prophet Micah, was "to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God." Mic. vi. 8.

The object of the Christian revelation, St. Paul assures us, is to "purify a peculiar people zealous of good works." Tit. ii. 4.

APPEN-

23
A P P E N D I X (B),

In St. Paul's epistle to Titus, c. iii. is the following passage.

V. 4. After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards men appeared.

V. 5. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he *saved* us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

V. 6. Which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

V. 7. That being *justified* by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

V. 8. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly,
that

24 A P P E N D I X (B).

that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works.

V. 14. And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not *unfruitful*.

In the 5th verse of the passage before us, the Christians of Crete are represented as *saved*; in the 7th, as *justified*.

In the 8th verse, however, they are exhorted, with a degree of earnestness that implies danger of omission, to “ maintain “ good works.”

And are apprized in the 14th verse, that a deficiency in moral worth would draw on them the imputation of spiritual barrenness.

In this case of degeneracy, the privileges of being *justified* from past sins, and *saved*
out

A P P E N D I X (B). 25

out of heathen darkness into Christian light, would tend, without doubt, to aggravate, rather than alleviate their condemnation; by occasioning a contrast between actual guilt and possible improvement; and by displaying opportunity frustrated by neglect.



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